

## What is the EPA Aging Initiative?

The Aging Initiative will prioritize and study environmental health hazards to older persons and examine the effect that a rapidly growing aging population will have on our environment. It will encourage volunteerism among older persons in their own communities to reduce hazards and protect the environment for future generations. The Initiative will be developed through an open, participatory process designed to shape a national agenda on the environment and the aging.

### Why is EPA focusing efforts on older Americans?

The mission of the EPA is the protection of human health and the natural environment. EPA Administrator Whitman has made the protection of the health of older persons a priority for the following reasons:

- The United States is undergoing a demographic transformation. By 2030, the number of elderly is expected to double to 70 million. The 85 and older population represents the fastest growing age group which is expected to number 14 million by 2030.
- Our bodies may become more susceptible to environmental hazards as we age. The immune system diminishes with increasing age in most people. In addition, the immune system response is often reduced because older persons are often on multiple medications and/or have a chronic condition that can make them more susceptible to environmental toxins.
- As we age, we have accumulated a lifetime of exposures that persist in our bodies.

### What are some of the environmental hazards that may especially affect the health of older Americans?

- **Drinking water** – micro organisms ( *e-coli* and *cryptosporidium* )
- **Indoor air**-- pollutants including radon, second-hand smoke, and carbon monoxide
- **Outdoor air** – pollutants such as ozone and particulate matter
- **Pesticides and volatile organic compounds** (VOCs)
- **Heavy metals** - lead and mercury
- **Temperature extremes**

### How can we create a National Agenda on the Environment and the Aging?

In the Spring of 2003, public meetings will be held throughout the country based on the findings from a December 2002 National Academy of Sciences workshop, “The Differential Susceptibility of Older Persons to Environmental Hazards.” The EPA will solicit input from all of the stakeholders, including older Americans, to ensure the development of a comprehensive National Agenda on the Environment and the Aging.